National Defense Research Institute

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INCREASING
A SENSE OF
COMMUNITY
IN THE MILITARY

The Role of Personnel
Support Programs

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PREFACE

In addition to organizational issues, the military is concerned with individual and family welfare. To meet the needs of military members and their families, the Department of Defense has created a number of personnel support programs. Such programs help maintain a high quality of life within the military. One important aspect of quality of life is a sense of community. The social science literature has shown that a sense of community is positively associated with a number of important organizational outcomes, such as commitment, performance, retention, and readiness. This report reviews nine insights from the social science literature that can be used to strengthen a sense of community within an organization. Suggestions are provided on how personnel support programs can implement these principles.

This report is part of a longer-term study of quality-of-life issues in the military. It is intended for military and civilian policymakers and decisionmakers with an interest in how quality of life bears on retention and readiness. The study is assessing the mix and scope of military support programs and will recommend policies to enhance the effectiveness of support programs. The work was sponsored by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Personnel Support, Families, and Education. This research was conducted in the Forces and Resources Policy Center, which is part of RAND's National Defense Research Institute, a federally funded research and development center sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, the unified commands, and the defense agencies.

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The Department of Defense maintains a wide variety of personnel support programs at considerable cost to meet the needs of military members and their families. These programs help maintain a high quality of life in the military services, and a high quality of life is viewed as important for readiness and retention reasons, among others. An important aspect of quality of life is a sense of community. A number of social science studies show that a strong sense of community fosters a wide range of positive outcomes, including a sense of well-being and lower incidence of spouse problems and other family problems. As military budgets are being cut sharply, it makes more sense than ever to maintain good support programs. However, it makes equally good sense to direct dwindling resources to those programs that yield the best effect, including those that enhance the sense of community.

This report discusses how programs and services can enhance a sense of community. It draws on the social science literature to identify ways to foster that sense. It also identifies some groups that would benefit more from such efforts because their specific situations make fostering community feeling more difficult.

WHAT IS A SENSE OF COMMUNITY?

A first step is to define a sense of community. The social science literature does not contain a commonly accepted definition; therefore,

one was devised for this report. The report hypothesizes that a sense of community derives from three interlocking sources: an attachment to people, developed through social interactions and supportive relationships; an attachment to a workgroup, fostered through involvement in similar tasks; and an attachment to an organization, created as an individual identifies with the values of an organization. Thus, the report defines a sense of community as consisting of two elements: social support—an emotional connection among members—and identification with the community—the sense of belonging to a group.

INCREASING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

A review of the social science literature yields nine ways or principles that enhance a sense of community in the military. These are group symbols, rewards and honors, common external threat, making military membership attractive, group size and individualization of members, personal influence, personal investment, contact and proximity, and group activities.

Group Symbols

Common symbols, such as uniforms or ceremonies, create and maintain a sense of community. The military already has many of these, but community and family programs can further enhance a sense of community by using them as well, e.g., team uniforms or ceremonies at which common uniforms, terms, and concepts play prominent roles.

Rewards and Honors

Group members who are honored are more likely to show commitment. Community leaders need to ensure that the rewards distributed are properly targeted, i.e., at the right members and for the right reasons. Subsidizing community activities falls in this category, as does honoring those who have made noteworthy contributions. It is important to ensure that awards go both to military personnel and members of their families.

Common External Threat

Having a common enemy inherently promotes a sense of community. The military already has a strong basis for this method. But the focus does not have to be on a potential military foe. It can target other groups, e.g., those who would squelch democracy or deny others human rights. However, simply promoting an awareness of other groups can foster a sense of community. Activities in this vein could include sports leagues that compete against other communities.

Making Military Membership Attractive

One aspect of this method deals with the larger problems facing the Department of Defense (DoD). It includes pay, benefits, quality of life, and other elements. However, community and family programs also play a role in meeting individual needs. High-quality programs can increase the sense of identity in belonging to the military. However, they must meet the needs of members, and continuous assessment of how well the programs meet needs is essential. Conversely, if programs are inadequately funded and poorly run, they can lead to negative impressions about the military.

Group Size and Individuality

Group loyalties are strongest when members are neither too personalized nor anonymous. When people are too focused on themselves within a group, they become overly concerned about evaluation. Being too submerged in the group leads to feelings of anonymity and a loss of responsibility. Group size largely determines these feelings, which suggests that communities and activities ought to be organized at some intermediate level. The goal would be to organize at a level that would enable subsequent interactions to involve the same groups of people. Repetitive contact fosters community sense. If the organization is too big, it engenders feelings of being lost in a crowd. Similarly, activities should not be targeted at small groups that have already developed strong bonds.

Personal Influence

People are drawn to activities when they feel that they can make a difference. This does not require a direct influence on decision-making. People regard organizations that allow them to have a voice as fair, and they are more satisfied and have a stronger sense of group commitment when they feel that they are working for a fair organization. Notably, people will support even unpopular decisions if they believe that the process of arriving at them was fair. This suggests that two-way channels of communication—soliciting opinion and providing rationale for decisions—is particularly important for developing community services. Such forums as town meetings might be a useful way to promote such communication.

Personal Investment

When individuals must invest something to become a member of a group, their identification with and commitment to the group increases. Thus, the sense of community can be strengthened by having its members invest time and resources. Such activities as peer counselors for newly arrived personnel, community committees to address common concerns (e.g., hours of operation of the child-care center), and advocates to represent specific subgroups of the community (e.g., single parents) provide opportunities for such investment.

Contact and Proximity

The more people interact, the more likely they are to feel attached to one another. Thus, sense of community is likely to increase when people live close to one another, and on-base housing is one way to facilitate interactions. Fortunately, it is not the only way. Even those people who do not live on post can be encouraged to participate in the on-post programs, particularly those involving family members. This also suggests that such on-post activities as bowling alleys and movie theaters, even when redundant with facilities off-post, can serve an important purpose.

Group Activities

Cooperation and mutual goals strengthen identification with and commitment to a group. Such programs as fund-raising for a common cause (e.g., local activity center or charity) can be helpful. Competition can also promote these feelings, and thus such activities as sports teams are also useful.

TARGETED SUBGROUPS

Available resources may be so constrained that policymakers must make decisions about which groups to support with services. Different groups have different needs, and some groups require less support than others. Analysis suggests that the following groups are most critical: military members living off-post, recently relocated, living abroad or in isolated areas, and deployed.

Members Living Off-Post

Military members living on a military base have an inherent advantage when it comes to building a sense of community. Thus, it may take a tailored effort to develop the same sense among those living in the civilian community. This tailoring could take the form of special transportation, hours designed to facilitate participation of the off-post residents, or holding activities within the civilian community.

Recently Relocated Members

Because frequent moves tend to inhibit development of a sense of community, community programs need to pay special attention to the needs of the recently relocated. Programs that ease the transition into the new community can be valuable.

Living Abroad or in Isolated Areas

Military members living in these types of situations can easily become isolated. It is difficult to fit into foreign or isolated communities. Community support programs need to tailor

themselves to the special needs of these groups. One way is by serving as a bridge between the member and the local communities.

Deployed

Personnel needs of this group are heightened by the separation from families and installations. Deployment duties can add to the stress of separation. Thus, it is important to establish programs quickly. Parallel programs should be developed to attend to the needs of those left behind.

It is worth noting that efforts to develop a sense of community can conceivably go too far if they estrange the military from the larger civilian community. Efforts to promote a distinct sense of community should not do so at the cost of driving a wedge between the military and civilians.

Several of the suggestions in this report can be made at relatively low cost, e.g., focusing on the most critical groups. Other may involve greater costs and may require trade-offs among programs. The aim would be to eliminate those that accomplish goals least effectively. Because the goals are not always clear, however, it might be necessary first to establish what those goals are before determining which programs accomplish them best. Any such research effort would need to develop measures of a sense of community and evaluate how changes in personnel support programs affect community ties. This study offers ideas for developing these measures and for modifying support programs to enhance their contribution to the community environment.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

INTRODUCTION

The military is unusual among organizations in that its personnel support programs extend beyond pure organizational concerns to include broader issues of individual and family welfare (Wickham, 1983). While concerns about the well-being of personnel are commendable in and of themselves, studies of the military suggest that high individual welfare and family welfare also are positively related the military mission (Burnam et al., 1992; Kerce, 1995). An important aspect of individual well-being or quality of life is the importance of a sense of community. Sense of community refers to the sense of connection among members of the group: a feeling of belonging or sense of emotional safety shared by community members (McMillan and Chavis, 1986; also see Myers and Diener, 1995). In the military context, the Department of Defense (DoD) speaks of "esprit de corps," "morale," and "unit camaraderie" as important goals (DoD, 1996).

EXTRA PRESSURES ON MILITARY PERSONNEL COMPARED TO CIVILIANS

A sense of community is especially important in the military because of the extra pressures the military way of life places on military personnel and their families. Compared to civilians, military personnel are separated more often and for longer periods from their family, relocate more frequently, and are assigned to locations that vary considerably in the cultural, work and educational opportunities they provide (Kerce, 1995; Burnam et al., 1992; Martin and Orthner, 1989). In addition, military personnel in combat units face the pos-

sibility of involvement in dangerous activities, often at short notice. These stressors are likely to increase the difficulty of maintaining close social connections with others. Seligman (1991) maintains that lack of social connections leads to high levels of depression in our society. In support of this, studies have shown that the pressures of the military way of life take their toll on military members. For example, two studies—one of the U.S. Army and one of personnel in all services—found that military personnel are more likely to screen "positive" for depression than civilians are (Burnam et al., 1992; DoD, 1995).[1] Moreover, in a review of the literature on the effects of family factors on the Army mission, Vernez and Zellman (1987) find that such stressors as frequent relocations, long separations, and the absence of choice regarding location are associated with members leaving the military.

In response to the stressors faced by military personnel, the Department of Defense has promoted the enhancement of family and individual well-being through community and family support programs. These programs include recreation programs, counseling programs, child-care services, and relocation programs. The assumption behind such programs is that increased individual and family well-being enhances workforce productivity, readiness, and commitment to the organization (Burnam et al., 1992; Kerce, 1995; Vernez and Zellman, 1987; Zellman, Johansen and Meredith, 1992).

OVERVIEW

This report considers how community and family programs can be improved to increase a sense of community in the military. While the existing family and community programs address sense of community concerns, a number of changes could be made to more

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[1]These studies show a correlation and not a causal relationship. The studies do not necessarily imply that increased depression is related to military life per se. Two factors could distort the comparison between military and civilian depression rates. First, differences between the military and civilian population may explain some or all of the differences in depression rates for the two groups. The studies control for basic demographic differences, but other unmeasured differences between the groups could explain the differences in the rates. Second, the depression screeners used in these studies were developed on civilian populations and then generalized to a military population. The screeners might not be as accurate a predictor of the need for clinical evaluation in the military populations as in the civilian populations.

directly increase the positive effects of the programs. The next chapter develops a definition of "sense of community," in which two aspects of sense of community are described and three sources of sense of community are outlined. This is followed by a more detailed discussion of the importance of sense of community. Chapter Three reviews the social science literature on group processes and discusses factors that increase sense of community. Chapter Four applies these principles to possible ways for personnel support groups to enhance the sense of community for military members in particularly stressful circumstances, such as deployments or isolated assignments. Chapter Five discusses alternative visions of how personnel support programs could be structured in the future. New research approaches are described in Chapter Six. These approaches would focus greater attention on the contribution of support programs to the sense of community. Chapter Seven looks at the specifics of studying the sense of community in a military setting. Chapter Eight reviews some possible negative consequences of strengthening community feelings and how these pitfalls can be avoided. A final chapter provides conclusions.

WHAT IS SENSE OF COMMUNITY?

The term "community" has been used to refer to several different things, including a specific geographic location, membership in a socially recognized group, a collection of individuals who share a particular behavior or demographic characteristic, and a subjective sense of connection that individuals feel because of a shared characteristic and their common sense of fate (Herek and Glunt, 1995). While the first refers to a community of place, the other three kinds of communities refer to communities of interests (Glynn, 1981; McMillan and Chavis, 1986). Despite the existence of a large body of literature on sense of community, and the broad use of the term, there is no accepted definition of the term "sense of community" (also see Balaoing, McCroskey, and Sandoval, 1995; Unger and Wandersman, 1985). Lyon (1987) reported that sociologists had come up with more than 90 definitions, and these agreed on only one point: communities consist of people. The problem appears to be that while an apparent consensus exists on the meaning of the term "sense of community," the term itself remains difficult to define. In many ways, sense of community is an intangible concept, and the absence of a definition reflects this. Researchers who claim to have defined "sense of community" have often done no more than suggest ways of measuring sense of community, without approaching a conceptual definition. For example, researchers will suggest that an intention to reside for a certain length of time in a neighborhood or the number of neighbors known by their first names define community, when in fact such parameters do no more than propose a measure of sense of community.

Despite these disagreements about the definition of community, there are some useful conceptualizations in the literature. For example, Unger and Wandersman define sense of community as "feelings of membership and belongingness, and shared socio-emotional ties" (1985, p. 155), while Sarason (1974) defines the ingredients of sense of community as "the perception of similarity to others, and acknowledged interdependence with others, a willingness to maintain this interdependence, . . . a feeling that one is part of a larger dependable and stable structure." (p. 157.) Similarly, Myers and Diener describe sense of community as a network of supportive relationships, a "we" feeling—pride in and feelings of belonging to a group (1995, p. 15). One of the most comprehensive definitions is provided by McMillan and Chavis (1986), who stress four elements of sense of community: membership in a group, a shared emotional connection between community members, mutual influence of community members on each other, and the sharing of values among community members. They show that various types of people, including citizens and social scientists, use these elements in assessing the strength of various communities and that the ratings of these individuals exhibit a high degree of agreement.

The disagreements in the literature despite a large body of research suggest that a productive area for future work would be a literature review of the work on the definition of sense of community, leading to an attempt to develop a definition that may be accepted by the field as a whole. This proposed review should also attempt to distinguish the term "sense of community" from related terms like "cohesion" and "neighboring." In the absence of a consensus on a definition, this report uses the common elements of the definitions above, defining sense of community as consisting of two aspects: *social support,* or an emotional connection between members, and *identification with the community,* or sense of belonging to a group. These will be discussed in more detail later in the report.

As Figure 2.1 shows, it is proposed here that sense of community in an organization like the military derives from three interlocking sources: one's attachment to *people,* through one's social interactions and supportive relationships with individuals in the community; one's attachment to one's *workgroup,* through involvement in similar tasks and the pursuit of shared goals; and one's

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- People
    - Supportive relationships
    - Social interactions

- Organization
    - The organization as a part self-identity
    - Sharing of organizational values

- Workgroup
    - Task involvement
    - Shared goals
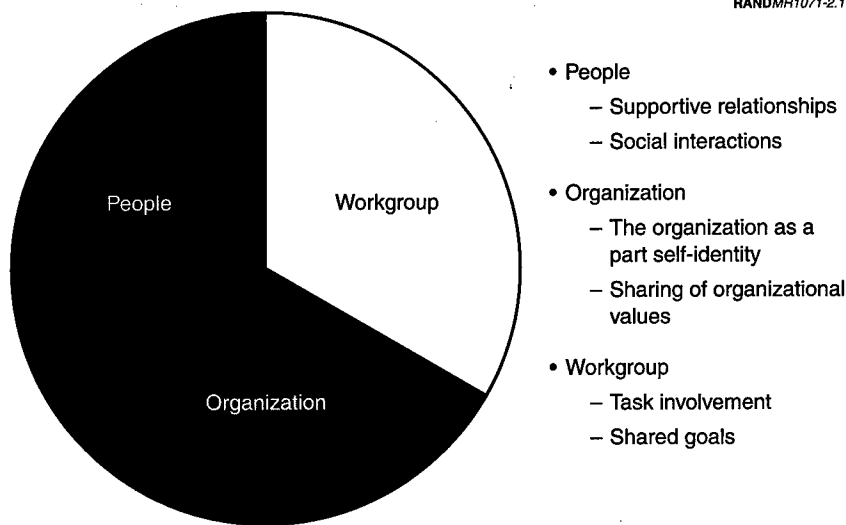
Figure 2.1—Three Sources of Sense of Community in Organizations

attachment to one's *organization*, in that the organization becomes a part of one's identity as a person and one increasingly identifies with the values of the organization. These three sources are not independent of one another but are mutual influences. Strong attachment at the organizational level increases one's attachment to others in the workgroup and the community at large, and vice versa.

The distinction between the three sources of sense of community is consistent with the literature on group cohesion, which distinguishes between "social cohesion" ("attachment to people" in our terms), "task cohesion" ("attachment to the workgroup"), and the less-studied term "group pride" ("attachment to the organization") (see MacCoun, 1993, for a discussion). The term "group cohesion" is often defined in ways that closely resemble the definitions used here to refer to sense of community. For example, cohesion has been referred to as "members' positive valuation of the group and their motivation to continue to belong to it." (Janis, 1983, p. 4.) However, the term "group cohesion" usually refers to a group engaged in a specific task and thus tends to exclude the larger community of fam-

ily and neighbors. Also, the term "cohesion" excludes the identity aspect that is at the core of the sense of community construct.

Because this report is concerned with the role of personnel support programs in maintaining a sense of community, it will focus mainly on increasing attachment to people and the organization, rather than on increasing attachment at the workgroup level, which involves military training and job procedures that fall largely outside of the domain of the personnel support programs.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SENSE OF COMMUNITY

The importance of sense of community is in its hypothesized ability to increase subjective well-being generally and commitment to the organization more specifically. Subjective well-being is synonymous with quality of life, or the degree to which one's experiences satisfy one's wants and needs (Rice, 1984). Commitment can be defined as an unwillingness to change identity as a member of a group or organization (Herek and Glunt, 1995). As Figure 3.1 shows, in the military context subjective well-being and commitment to the organization are considered important predictors of readiness, performance, and retention. Consistent with Figure 3.1, military leaders assume that the strong social bonds that make up one aspect of community identity increase loyalty to the military (Martin and Orthner, 1989). Also, senior military leaders consider well-being an integral element for ensuring the accomplishment of the military mission, assuming that high performance and retention result from high satisfaction with the quality of one's life (Fletcher and Giesler, 1981; Martin and Orthner, 1989).

As Figure 3.1 shows, sense of community itself is dependent on a number of variables, including family and community programs and services. In addition, sense of community is influenced by characteristics of the individual (such as optimism—see Kerce, 1995) and characteristics of the military members' family. Because the goal of this report is to discuss how programs and services can increase sense of community, characteristics of the military service member and his or her family, which fall outside the programs' domain, are not discussed.
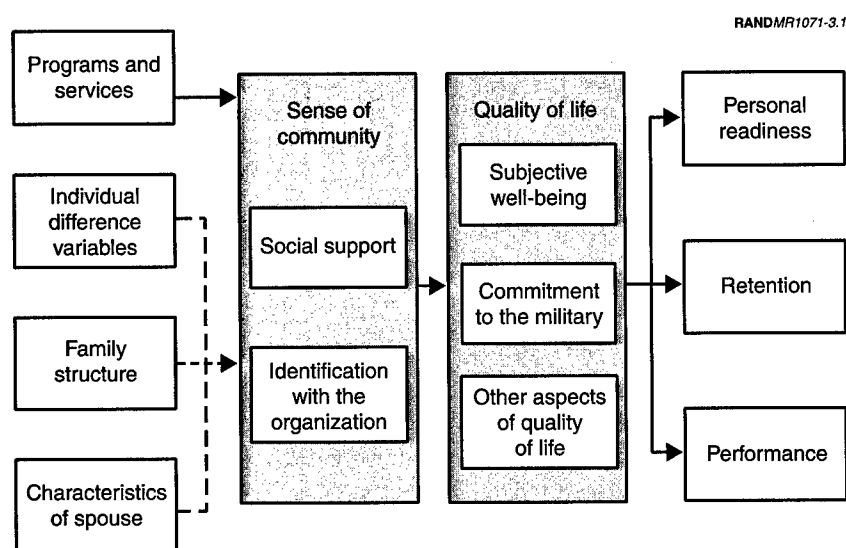
**Figure 3.1—A Framework for Understanding Relationships Between
Programs and Services, Sense of Community, and Outcome Variables**

Research on sense of community has found evidence of important
correlational links among a sense of military community, satisfaction
with and commitment to the military way of life, and readiness and
performance. In support of hypothesized relationships between
social support and military outcomes, some propose that feelings of
closeness and caring among group members allow a group to remain
engaged in a task even in the face of severe stresses of battle (e.g.,
Marlowe, 1979). There is evidence to support this claim in the
research literature. For example, some evidence associates cohesion
in a group with better psychological coping (see MacCoun, 1993, for
a review) and shows that the presence of a strong support network at
the unit level decreases the likelihood of stress-related difficulties
(Marlowe and Martin, 1988).

Other research suggests links between identification and commit-
ment. For example, studies on group cohesion in the military sug-
gest that the perception of shared goals is positively correlated with
performance (see MacCoun, 1993, for a review). Similarly, in a study

of the Marine Corps, Kerce (1995) finds that military personnel with a high sense of identification with the U.S. Marines (i.e., those who agree with the statement that the best thing about the Marines is the opportunity to be "one of the few, the proud") feel more positive about their jobs and are more committed to the Marines than those with lower identification. Moreover, those who are more committed are less likely to miss all or part of maneuvers or exercises than those who evince lower commitment. Also, those who are more committed are less likely to lose time from regular duty for personal and family reasons. Although some of these effects are small, in the large military organization they add up.

Research also indicates that sense of community influences spouses and families and thus may have an indirect influence on military personnel (see Vernez and Zellman, 1987, for a review). Examples of such studies include one by Schneider and Gilley (1984), who find that spouses low in community identity are four times as likely to return early to the United States from their station abroad than spouses who are high in community identity. In turn, spouse and family problems have been related to problems of the military service member. For example, Belenky, Tyner, and Sodetz (1983) show that family stress has a negative relationship with soldiers' performance and psychological well-being, and Johnson (1984) shows that a member's identification with the military group inversely relates to the level of stress in his or her family.

Several studies of civilian populations also suggest a positive relationship between sense of community and individual quality of life (Ahlbrant and Cunningham, 1979; Bachrach and Zautra, 1985; Chavis, 1983; Doolittle and MacDonald, 1978; Florin and Wandersman, 1984; Glynn, 1981; Riger and Lavrakas, 1981; Riger, LeBailly, and Gordon, 1981; Wandersman and Giamartino, 1980). For example, Bachrach and Zautra (1985) find that, in dealing with an external threat, a strong sense of community positively relates to a sense of purpose and control over the situation and is associated with problem-focused coping that attempts to counter or alter the threat itself. Similarly, in a study of three residential communities, Glynn (1981) finds positive relationships between sense of community and individuals' perceptions of personal "community-efficacy," or an indi-

vidual's perception that he or she can effectively negotiate the procedures established in a community. [1]

These civilian and military studies offer some support for the theoretical framework shown in Figure 3.1, but the research does not provide conclusive evidence to "prove" the causal structure of the model. The weakness of the research is that the studies are based on correlational relationships and the causal relationships are difficult to determine. As Figure 3.2 shows, it is possible that, rather than sense of community influencing important outcomes like commitment, readiness, and performance, it is these outcomes that influence sense of community. Also, it is possible that a third variable—for example, an individual difference like personality—influences both these outcome variables and sense of community. One study speaks somewhat to this point: in her study of the Marine Corps, Kerce (1995) finds that individual differences in optimism play an almost negligible role in predicting perceptions of subjective well-being. Thus she finds that, while differences in optimism among individuals exist, these differences do not explain differences in subjective well-being among individuals.

An important methodological device for disentangling these relationships would be a longitudinal study with repeated measurement of individual attitudes over time. This longitudinal approach would allow researchers to assess individual differences in service members' attitudes when entering the military and measure how those attitudes change in various workplace and personnel support environments.

IS THERE A PROBLEM WITH THE SENSE OF COMMUNITY IN THE MILITARY?

While it is clear from the research literature that sense of community might have positive effects on commitment, performance, retention, and readiness, it is not yet clear whether the sense of community in the U.S. military organization is high or low. The results from a number of recent studies of the U.S. military suggest that efforts to

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[1]Glynn (1981) calls this "community competence."

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                        ┌─────────────────┐
                        │   Personality   │
                        └─────────────────┘
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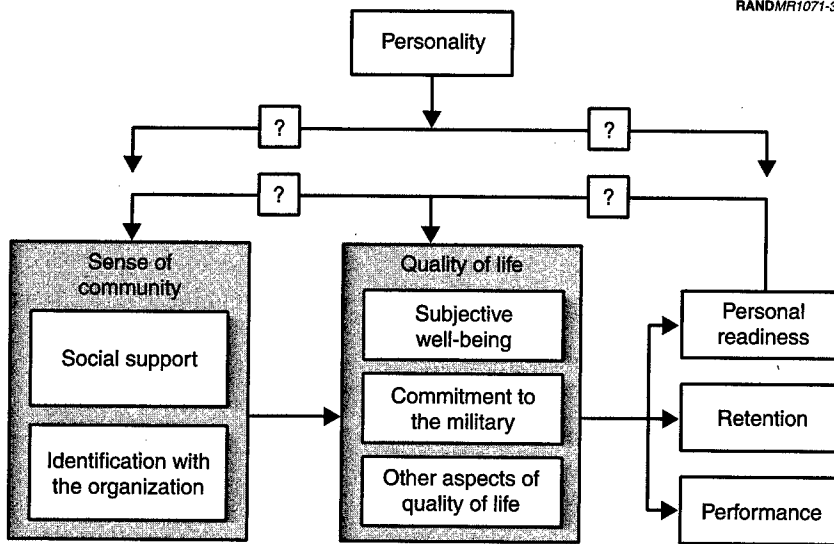
Figure 3.2—The Problems in Drawing Causal Conclusions from the
Existing Literature

increase the sense of community in the military could be profitable. For example, in a study of the U.S. Army, Burnam et al. (1992) find that the average soldier does not report strong commitment to the Army—that is, the soldier is not sure that the Army is the best of all places to work or whether he or she shares the Army's values. Similarly, in a study of the Marine Corps, Kerce (1995) finds that Marines as a whole score slightly below the midpoint, indicating that they are slightly more likely to disagree than to agree with the statements about being committed to the military. In her recommendations, Kerce urges that actions be taken to increase identification with, positive assessment of, and commitment to the organization. Similarly, in his review of studies on the relationship between cohesion and military performance, MacCoun (1993) finds that cohesion in the military (which MacCoun defines in terms very similar to a sense of community) is not now, and never has been, high.

The nature of the military workforce may limit the attachment of members to a military community. First, the personnel system is

predicated on a young force where most members are only expected to serve a single three- or four-year term. Since most members expect short tenure in the military, they have little incentive to immerse themselves in a military culture. Second, the military is the first full-time employer for many members. These inexperienced workers have little knowledge of the military workplace, so it may not be surprising that many have little commitment to the military community.

On the other hand, a sense of community might be a particularly salient feature of the military workplace because the workforce is young and inexperienced.

HOW DOES A SENSE OF COMMUNITY LEAD TO INCREASES IN COMMITMENT, PERFORMANCE, RETENTION, AND READINESS?

Sense of community might lead to higher commitment, performance, retention, and readiness by satisfying people's need for three kinds of social support and need for identity.

The Community as Social Support

One of the richest descriptions of social support is provided by a study of community ties and social support among individuals living in a community near Toronto, Canada:

> [Community] networks are important to the routine operations of households, crucial to the management of crises, and sometimes instrumental in helping respondents change their situations. Many provide havens: a sense of belonging and being helped. Many provide bandages; routine emotional aid and small services that help [community members] cope with the stresses and strains of their situations. A sizable minority provide safety nets that lessen the effects of acute crises and chronic difficulties. Several provide social capital to change situations (houses, jobs and spouses) or to change the world (local school board politics, banning unsafe food additives, stopping cruelty to animals). (Wellman and Wortley, 1990, p. 583.)

As Figure 3.3 shows, sense of community hypothetically has positive effects on quality of life and leads to increases in commitment, retention, and performance by providing three kinds of social support to individuals (Weiss, 1982; see Unger and Wandersman, 1985, for a discussion). Functional and instrumental support involves the exchange of small services among community members, such as fixing things around the house, child care, help moving in or out, feeding of pets and watering of plants, and care during sickness. Informational support refers to the information exchanged by members of the community that helps individuals negotiate their environment more effectively. This includes information on where to shop, where to obtain insurance, who to refer complaints to, and how to prepare for difficult situations like deployment.

One of the most important kinds of social support appears to be the personal and emotional support provided through the social relationships that develop in a strong community. Communities provide individuals with opportunities to interact with similar others.

These interactions with similar others provide individuals with the most information about how they are doing (Festinger, 1953), which

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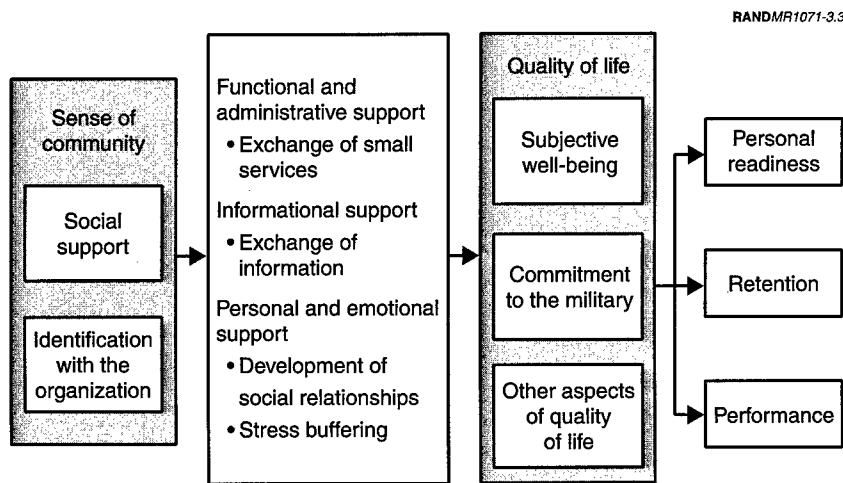
Figure 3.3—Sense of Community Provides Three Kinds of Social Support

is especially important under conditions of stress (Schachter, 1959). A large body of research in medicine, psychology, and sociology indicates that health and well-being are enhanced by social relationships, especially under stressful conditions (Alloway and Bebbington, 1987; Burt, 1986; Cohen, 1988; Cohen and Syme, 1985; House, Landis, and Umberson, 1988). This is sometimes referred to as the buffering hypothesis. Similar results have been found in studies of the military. For example, Vernez and Zellman (1987) conducted a review of studies that examined the influence of family and environmental factors on Army outcomes and found that those satisfied with their peer relationships have lower attrition and higher reenlistment. Moreover, a 1992 study of Army families by Burnam et al. found that perceived social support is the one variable consistently and strongly related to family and individual well-being variables, including better emotional well-being, lower prevalence of depression, and higher satisfaction with marital relationships. The other variables considered in the Burnam et al. study included family structure; such Army variables as length of hours worked and number of times separated during the past year; such individual characteristics as age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and rank; and characteristics of one's spouse, such as spouse's emotional well-being and division of household tasks. These results back up perceptions of military leaders, who believe that the social support of friends and neighbors lead to the cohesion, loyalty, and dedication to duty that sustain military families (Martin and Orthner, 1989).

A special kind of social support that crosses all three kinds discussed above is the perception that the leadership is supportive. Studies of the military have confirmed the importance of this type of social support (Burnam et al., 1992; Marlowe, 1997; Orthner and Pittman, 1986; Vernez and Zellman, 1987). For example, Burnam et al. (1992) showed that the perception that the Army leadership is supportive is related to higher levels of emotional well-being and lower prevalence of soldiers screening "positive" for depression. These effects are especially strong among single soldiers, perhaps because their lives are concentrated on the base and more controlled by the Army leadership than the lives of soldiers with families. Other researchers have found similar relationships between perceptions of Army leadership and outcomes. For example, in a review of the literature concerning the effects of family factors on Army retention and readiness,

Vernez and Zellman (1987) find relationships between perceptions of Army leadership and practice on the one hand, and well-being, commitment, retention, and job performance on the other. Similarly, the perception of Army support for one's family is an important predictor of outcome variables. For example, enlisted soldiers and officers who perceive that the Army is supportive of their families have fewer job problems and show a higher level of commitment to the Army (Burnam et al., 1992). Also, officers who perceive the Army leadership as supportive of their family tend to serve the Army for a longer period of time. Other researchers have found similar results: for example, in a study of Air Force personnel, Orthner and Pittman (1986) found that organizational support for families is significantly related to the job commitment of personnel.

As suggested above, the effects of perceptions of leadership support on well-being and performance are especially strong at times of increased stress in soldiers' lives. For example, during relocation, soldiers report better emotional well-being when the Army community is perceived as making them feel welcome and as helping their family settle into their current duty station (Burnam et al., 1992). Burnam et al. also found that positive feelings about relocation assistance are related to a decreased likelihood of screening "positive" for depression. At a more extreme level, Marlowe (1997) found that soldiers who believe that their superiors do not value their lives are the most likely to experience stress during war.

These findings suggest the importance of support for the welfare of military members and their families by the military organization. In their review, Vernez and Zellman (1987) conclude that the Army leadership should place more emphasis on the communication of their concerns for family welfare and implement actions consistent with those concerns.

The Community's Role in Providing an Identity

While a strong sense of community has important effects on the individual through the increased commitment and well-being that result from the social support provided in social relationships, sense of community might also be linked to readiness and performance through increases in identification with the military organization. Social psychology suggests that identity may add something to the

power of communities beyond that explained by social relationships and supportive interactions.

The significance of the identity concept is based on research indicating that our self-identity, or our beliefs about who we are, are based to a substantial degree on our memberships in groups. As Figure 3.4 shows, individuals have a personal identity based on the things that distinguish them from everyone else, such as their personalities, their background, and their family and life history, but their self-identities are also based to a large degree on different social identities. For example, John is a sergeant and thus feels similar to other sergeants and shares their experiences. Also, John is a member of the Army and as such feels close to others in the Army, and different from Navy, Air Force, and Marine personnel. However, with all of these people he shares his membership of the military and thus shares a sense of belonging with these people that he does not share with civilians. Lastly, John is an American and shares that identity with other Americans.

The motivation to belong to groups is thought to derive from individuals' needs for validation and similarity to others (assimilation) on the one hand and a need to be unique and individuated (differentiation) on the other (Brewer, 1991; also see Codol, 1984; Lemaine, 1974; Maslach, 1974; Snyder and Fromkin, 1980; and Ziller, 1964). The needs for assimilation and differentiation are both satisfied through group identities. Assimilation is satisfied by group membership, while differentiation is satisfied by comparisons with other groups. Thus for a soldier in the Army, identification with others in the Army allows him or her to experience a sense of belonging with other soldiers, while comparisons with Navy and Air Force personnel allow the soldier to experience a sense of differentiation from others.

While an individual may belong to many social groups, he or she might only identify with a small selection of these groups. For example, an individual might identify himself or herself as a Marine, as a Latino-American, and as a golfer but might not necessarily think of himself or herself as an American, as a college graduate, or as a New Yorker, even though the individual also belongs to those groups. Thus group identifications, or social identities, are selected from

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American

U.S. military

Army

Sergeant

John

Social identities
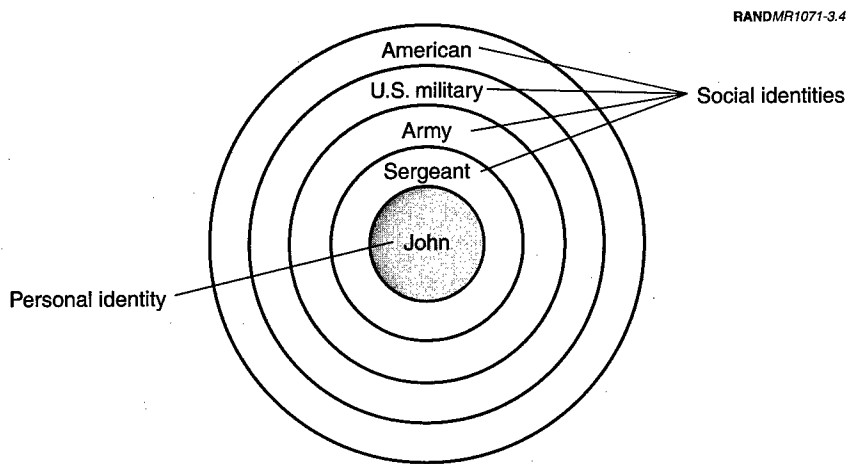
Personal identity

Figure 3.4—Personal and Social Identities

the groups available to an individual at a particular time in a specific context (Brewer, 1991). The identity selected is determined to a significant degree by the environment in which the individual finds himself or herself. For example, if John is engaged in a war with another nation, his social identity is likely to be most salient at the level of his nationality. However, during training and exercises, John's identity is likely to be salient at his workgroup level. The stronger an identity, the more likely the identity is to pervade across time and contexts.

Individuals are identified with a community to the extent that the community constitutes a stable and central component of their idea of who they are—one that is relevant to many different social interactions and facets of their lives (Herek and Glunt, 1995). In many ways, their identity as a group member becomes a part of the self, just as such personal characteristics as intelligence, inquisitiveness, and physical attributes are important aspects of the self. Once established as a part of an individual's identity, groups are capable of arousing intense commitment and sacrifice. The stronger the sense of community in the group, the more influence the group has over its members (Berkowitz, 1954; Lott and Lott, 1961; McGrath, 1984; McMillan and Chavis, 1986). Thus, as Figure 3.5 shows, it is through

the effects of group identities on behavior that performance, reten-
tion, and readiness are influenced. A large volume of research on
group processes shows that group members behave in ways that
favor their own group and will take actions to defend their social
groups (Brewer, 1979; Hinkle and Schopler, 1986; Messick and
Mackie, 1989; Mullen, Brown, and Smith, 1992; Tajfel, 1982; Turner,
1987). This group behavior can vary between altruistic acts, in which
group members place the welfare of the group before their individual
safety and comfort (Caporael et al., 1989; McMillan and Chavis,
1986), and conflict, in which violence erupts between different
groups.

Burnam et al. (1992) find a positive correlation between an index of
identification with the military organization and expected years of
service (r = 0.57). This result is consistent with the framework sug-
gested in Figure 3.5, but several caveats are in order. First, as
discussed above, the direction of causation is suspect here. Military
members who plan on staying in the military may have a stronger
identification with the military because they focus more on their jobs
or military activities than members who plan to leave the military for
a civilian job in a few years. Second, "identification" may not be very
malleable to military policies or practices. For example, the study
shows few significant differences in member identification across
member characteristics, family structure, and a variety of Army

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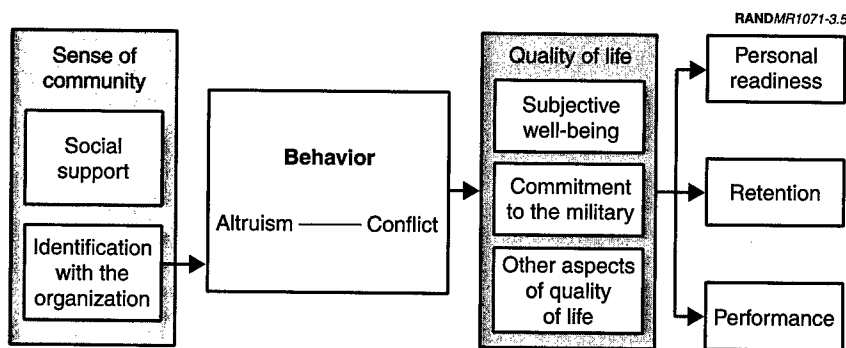
Figure 3.5—Identity Influences Outcomes Through Group Behavior

workplace factors (such as frequency of moves, unit mission, and location). Controlling for other factors, the study did find that hours worked per week has a strong positive influence on identification with the military. This result is unlikely to recommend longer hours as the key to improving members' identification. Rather, it is likely that members who choose to spend extra time at their jobs are already more committed to the organization than those who do not.

While organizational identification and commitment can be useful to the military organization, there is some danger that members might identify with groups or subgroups not necessarily aligned with the overall goals and objectives of the organization. For example, Army infantry sergeants may have common work experiences and share a common group identity. On one level, this might be useful to the Army, because the sergeants can network with one another to solve common problems. The Army is also served, however, by having infantry sergeants who recognize their role in the broader Army and are willing to allow the organizational objectives to override those of the group. The great challenge for the military and other organizations is to find the right balance among group identities that furthers the broader goals of the organization.

HOW TO INCREASE SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND COMMITMENT

To determine factors that may be used to increase sense of community, a review of the social science literature on group processes was conducted. As Figure 4.1 shows, nine principles were found that can guide attempts to increase sense of community. Each of these is described below, and suggestions are provided on how to implement these principles through personnel support programs.

GROUP SYMBOLS

Sense of community includes a clear sense of membership and boundaries, clarifying who belongs and who does not. Belonging is increased by the use of language, dress, signs, and traditions that emphasize membership. Common symbols, such as uniforms, ceremonies, and terms and concepts that define group membership, will create and maintain a sense of community and are especially important when a community is heterogeneous (McMillan and Chavis, 1986). The military organization already has many of these symbols of group membership in place as part of its standard operating procedure, including the wearing of uniforms, the use of special symbols and ceremonies, and the prevalence of concepts and terms specific to the military organization. Community and family programs can further increase sense of community by providing opportunities in which community symbols have high salience among community members. These include the organization of such community events as family outings, sports leagues in which

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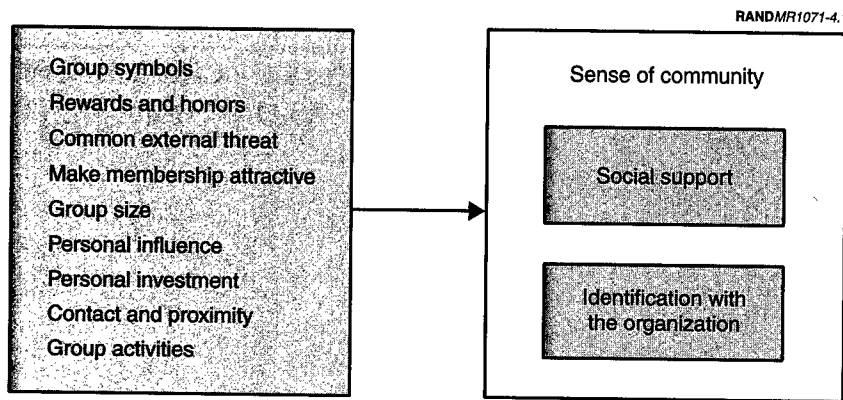
Figure 4.1—Overview of Factors That Increase Sense of Community

military members participate over longer periods in common uniforms, or community ceremonies in which terms, concepts, symbols, and uniforms play prominent roles.

REWARDS AND HONORS

Group members honored by the group are more likely to show strong commitment, while those who are punished feel less attachment (Festinger, 1953; James and Lott, 1964). Community leaders should thus be careful to examine the messages that rewards and punishments are sending. The military organization already uses rewards and corrections to maintain order and improve performance in the organization. Community and family programs can increase sense of community through programs that reward positive targeted behaviors. For example, community events should include appealing refreshments and snacks provided at minimal cost. Moreover, group outings can be organized in which the larger number of participants can bring substantial cost savings to military members and their families. Lastly, programs can be created that honor members of the community who have made particularly commendable contributions. These awards should be given to both military personnel and their families.

COMMON EXTERNAL THREAT

A common outgroup or enemy tends to unify members of a group, increasing sense of community and commitment to the group (Dion, 1979; Elder and Clipp, 1988; Lanzetta, 1955; Sherif et al., 1961; Wilder and Shapiro, 1984). Because the military organization is set up with the purpose of withstanding an external threat, this basis for a strong community is already in place. However, the increasing occurrence of peacekeeping missions instead of traditional conflicts will likely dilute the sense of a clear outgroup. Fortunately, a common external threat can be created at numerous levels, including traditional conceptions of the enemy as well as less aggressive versions of "us" and "them," such as defining the outgroup as those who wish to limit democracy, those who spread ethnic hatred, or those who seek to obtain power by illegitimate means. Also, external threats can involve members of other groups, who are not enemies in the traditional sense but who are also not considered part of one's own group. Thus, a stronger sense of community within the military can be created by having community and family programs organize friendly sports leagues or games against members of other communities. Such programs will be especially beneficial if they include individuals in their role as group members, rather than as individuals with no salient membership.[1]

MAKING MILITARY MEMBERSHIP ATTRACTIVE

People are social beings who derive a great deal of their sense of self from their membership in social groups (Tajfel and Turner, 1986; Turner, 1987). The features of the groups to which people belong will thus affect the self-concept. Individuals are more likely to identify with groups with appealing characteristics than those with unappealing characteristics. Specifically, individuals are most likely to develop strong ties to a community or organization that can fulfill their needs, that appears competent, that shares their values, and that is high is status (Doolittle and MacDonald, 1978; McMillan and Chavis, 1986; Zander, Natsoulas, and Thomas, 1960). Some of these

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[1]Military programs should be designed to discourage members from seeing the civilian community as an outgroup. As discussed below, participation in the military community should not conflict with involvement in the civilian community.

are larger issues facing the Department of Defense as a whole, rather than the community and family programs alone, in that the military service must offer a good quality of life for its members to attract and maintain highly competent individuals. However, the community and family programs play an important role in meeting specific needs of individual community members. In addition, the quality of community and family programs communicates messages about the values and status of the military organization. There is a danger that the perception of low-quality services in the military (e.g., see Martin and Orthner, 1989) will lead to low identification with the military organization. Community and family programs can thus increase the sense of identification and belonging military members feel by providing high-quality programs that are finely tuned to the needs of community members. The maintenance of high-quality programs must include a continuous assessment of the needs of community members and the success of the programs in meeting these needs.

GROUP SIZE AND INDIVIDUATION OF MEMBERS

Social identities and group loyalties are strongest when group members are neither too personalized nor too deindividuated (Brewer, 1991; also see Codol, 1984; Frable, Blackstone, and Scherbaum, 1990; Fromkin, 1970, 1972; Lemaine, 1974; Lord and Saenz, 1985; Maslach, 1974; Snyder and Fromkin, 1980; Ziller, 1964). When individuals are too personalized or self-aware they become overly concerned about evaluation, while too little individuation leads to feelings of anonymity and loss of responsibility.

Personalization and deindividuation are determined to a substantial degree by group size. If the group is too large or too small, individuals behave selfishly and are unwilling to make sacrifices for the group. In support of this, a meta-analysis by Mullen and Copper (1993) suggests that the positive relationships between group cohesion and performance occur especially in small groups. In the military context, research from a number of sources suggests that it is at the workgroup level that military identity is most activated (Furukawa et al., 1987; Marlowe, 1979; Martin and Orthner, 1989; Savage and Gabriel, 1976; Siebold and Kelly, 1988). In response to this, a number of researchers from the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research have been involved in the evaluation of the Army's Unit

Manning System (UMS). Rather than treating soldiers as inter-
changeable individuals, the UMS keeps soldiers together as units for
approximately three years with a stable leadership. Studies on UMS
have shown very positive effects on the development of positive
sense of community among soldiers, including strong bonds
between soldiers, between soldiers and their leaders, and between
soldiers' families (see Martin and Orthner, 1989, for a review).

These results call for the large military organization to differentiate
itself into subgroups, encouraging group loyalties at an intermediate
level. This allows for high group loyalty and avoids uncontrolled
splintering and faction formation (also see Martin and Orthner,
1989). The creation of communities at an intermediate level will also
allow the military to avoid standardization across bases and instead
capitalize on strengths of the local environment and of the indi-
viduals in the community. Community and family programs can
contribute to the development of identities at the appropriate level of
specificity through the organization of interactions that target groups
at intermediate levels. Specifically, the organization of large events
that include groups of individuals unlikely to interact with one
another on a daily basis are not likely to promote stronger commu-
nity ties.[2] Such events are unlikely to be followed by future inter-
actions between those who attended the event, and are likely to
increase feelings of being lost in a large organization. Similarly,
events should not be targeted at small groups who have already
developed strong social bonds. Instead, community events should
bring together individuals with high potential for interaction but who
have yet to develop strong relationships. Examples would include
neighborhood events for personnel who work on the same projects
but have not had opportunities for extended interaction. These
events should include family members.

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[2]Events are organized for a variety of purposes, so all events will not necessarily be
structured to promote a stronger sense of community. For example, large concerts or
fairs may serve primarily as social or fund-raising events. Nonetheless, it may be
possible to enhance the value of many events by structuring them in ways that pro-
mote community ties and social bonds.

PERSONAL INFLUENCE

Individuals are drawn to communities where they feel they are influential. It is important that the military maintain a force that appreciates personal choice and individual differences and in which personnel feel they have something valuable to contribute to the community (McMillan and Chavis, 1986; Peterson and Martens, 1972).

Numerous studies find that the perception that one's opinions have been considered is more important than the belief that one has control over decisionmaking (Folger and Greenberg, 1985; Tyler, 1987; Tyler and McGraw, 1986; Tyler, Rasinski, and Spodick, 1985). Specifically, procedures in which group members perceive they have a voice are perceived as fair. Studies of both employees and managers of large organizations have found that group members feel more satisfied with their work when they perceive the decision-making procedures as fair (Kim and Mauborgne, 1993; Moorman, Niehoff, and Organ, 1993; Schappe, 1996). Also, studies show that the perception that decisionmaking is fair enhances the trust members feel in the organization (Kim and Mauborgne, 1993; Korsgaard, Schweiger, and Sapienza, 1995). Perceptions that the decision-making process is fair also have important consequences for the organization: a number of studies have shown that employees who perceive decisionmaking as fair are more committed to the group (Kim and Mauborgne, 1993; Korsgaard, Schweiger, and Sapienza, 1995; Moorman, Niehoff, and Organ, 1993; Schappe, 1996) and less likely to leave the organization (Dailey and Kirk, 1992). Also, individuals will support even unpopular decisions by authorities when they perceive that the authorities use fair decisionmaking procedures (Kim and Mauborgne, 1993; Tyler and Degoey, 1995). Such effects are especially strong for individuals highly identified with the community (Tyler and Degoey, 1995).

One way to increase perceptions of fair decisionmaking is to provide more information to military members and their families about how and why decisions are made. Studies of the military indicate that this kind of information may have positive effects on military outcomes. In their review of the literature on the influence of family factors on Army outcomes, Vernez and Zellman (1987) find that the families of soldiers who perceive separations as necessary have more positive

attitudes towards the separation, and in turn, these positive attitudes positively affect retention. To some degree then, the dissemination of information and justifications for military rules and procedures alone will increase sense of community.

Even greater effects on attrition, retention, and readiness will follow from providing military members with an opportunity to influence decisions (also see Vernez and Zellman, 1987). Personal influence is important on two fronts: influence or control over personal life and personal influence over the group as a whole. Influence over personal life is a significant consideration for organizations because individuals will rebel when their sense of freedom is threatened (Brehm and Brehm, 1981). However, any large organization requires rules and regulations to function, and these regulations may restrict individual freedom. Similarly, the effective functioning of services entails rules and regulations. Such rules and regulations should thus be used only when necessary and should be formulated to maximize individual freedom (see also Martin and Orthner, 1989).

It is important also for the individual to be able to influence the community as a whole. Strong feelings of community will develop only when members participate in the formation of the community. Cohesiveness and personal influence are thus not mutually exclusive but are both important characteristics of a strong community.

One way to solve this apparent conflict between rules and regulations necessary for the effective functioning of the organization and the freedom to determine one's own life as well as have an influence on the community as a whole is to allow service members a say in the rules and regulations (also see Vernez and Zellman, 1987). Thus services should be developed and improved with input from military personnel and their families. This will ensure not only satisfaction with the outcomes of community decisionmaking but, equally important, also satisfaction with community procedures (Lind and Tyler, 1988; Tyler, 1987). While it is not possible for a large military organization to allow its rules to be entirely determined by the members themselves, the organization can provide a regular forum where members' opinions can be voiced. Such a forum could take the form of a community meeting, akin to city council meetings. This forum would allow both for the expression of opinions on decisions that

affect the individual and for individuals' suggestions on community policy.

PERSONAL INVESTMENT

When individuals need to engage in activities to become a member of the group, their identification and commitment to the group is strengthened (Aronson and Mills, 1959; Festinger, 1953; McMillan, 1976). These investments can occur on many different levels: through admission procedures, training, labor, and opportunities for volunteer activities. The military has a substantial training procedure that ensures considerable personal investment. In addition, training is a continuous activity for military members. Community and family programs can contribute to sense of community by encouraging individuals to invest their time and resources into the community. Examples of investments are peer counseling positions to help families while the military service member is deployed, buddies for new arrivals on bases, community advocate positions to represent segments of the community (e.g., a community advocate for single parents), and community committees to address salient community issues (e.g., a community committee on child-care issues).[3]

CONTACT AND PROXIMITY

Social scientists have shown that the more people interact, the more likely they are to feel attached to one another (Sherif et al., 1961; Festinger, 1950). Studies of the military have found similar results (Ingraham, 1984). In fact, mere proximity appears to be sufficient to create a bond. For example, a study of married-student housing on a college campus found that people who lived in the same building and the same floor were more often friends than those who lived farther apart (Festinger, Schachter, and Back, 1950). While proximity can create a bond, a stronger bond is created with more positive interaction (Cook, 1970), and the more important the shared event is

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[3]Incentives for personal investment should be carefully structured, so they are not viewed as unfair by military members. For example, in the past, spouses were sometimes expected to perform voluntary work on the base. As more spouses joined the civilian workforce, this incentive was viewed as burdensome and unfair.

to those involved the stronger the bond (Myers, 1962; see McMillan and Chavis, 1986).

Sense of community is thus likely to be strengthened if military members live close to one another where there are many opportunities for interactions. Currently, the majority of military families live off-base. There are three major reasons for this. First, insufficient military housing is available on-base. Second, off-base living brings a certain privacy and independence, and third, home ownership brings certain economic benefits (Martin and Orthner, 1989). Despite these benefits to off-base living, there are good reasons to believe that the military can increase sense of community, and its positive consequences, through on-base housing.

Fortunately, locating housing on-base is not the only way to collect the benefits of proximity and community. If encouraging military members to live on-base is not cost-effective or it does not allow for the economic benefits of home ownership or offers less privacy than off-base housing, positive interactions can be encouraged through other means. In many ways, community and family programs are already working towards these goals. An example is the present practice of encouraging the use of installation programs and facilities. On-base services, such as the commissary and base exchange, and entertainment programs like bowling alleys and movie theaters, while sometimes redundant with local services, provide a place for people to run into other service members and their families, as well as opportunities to socialize together. These kinds of services would then become especially important if on-base housing were to be eliminated. To encourage interactions, personnel support programs can also organize on-base events and programs that include the whole military family. Incentives also increase the likelihood that military personnel and families will maintain interaction. Incentives could include low-cost snacks and refreshments and price breaks on goods and services. Lastly, interactions can be encouraged through the involvement of community members in the decisionmaking process. As discussed above, these could involve a community forum in which community members can participate in the formation of community rules and regulations.

It was mentioned earlier that interactions among community members are particularly important at key points and during stressful

periods. It is during these times that the existence of social programs for those most affected will become crucial. Community and family programs can address stressful periods through the provision of counseling services. The use of group counseling in place of individual counseling will increase feelings of belonging to the community and should thus be used whenever possible and clinically appropriate.[4] Such counseling is also likely to be a less expensive method of providing social support than individual counseling. To increase sense of community and decrease the costs associated with counseling, community and family programs should invest part of their resources in the training of buddies and peer counselors (for example, buddies for new arrivals, peer counselors for help during deployment) and the setting up of peer support groups (for example, a transition assistance peer support group, a support group for spouses of deployed individuals, a support group for military members who are single parents).[5] While these kinds of counseling are not appropriate for all issues facing military personnel, such counseling can serve a preventative function, at the same time that it increases the perception that the military community is a caring environment and allows members to become more invested in the community. There will be cases in which individual sessions are needed and in which professional help is required. Also, the use of group and peer counseling methods opens the possibility that cases that needed professional or individual help are treated at an inappropriate level. However, this danger is compensated for by the wider availability of social support, which will increase the likelihood that cases missed in the past are now identified and receive appropriate help earlier.

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[4]Some problems are best-suited to individual solutions. Other problems may be ill-suited to the group setting, because service members are reluctant to divulge them in front of a group of peers. The emphasis here is on the potential benefits group counseling could contribute to creating a sense of community, but these considerations should be balanced against other objectives as well.

[5]Some military programs already use the "peer counseling" approach. For example, sponsors are typically assigned to service members when they are assigned to a new location. These sponsors help relocated members adjust to their new unit and settle into the local area. Similarly, military units generally have a designated financial management specialist who is trained in helping members with personal financial matters.

GROUP ACTIVITIES: WITHIN-GROUP COOPERATION AND INTERGROUP COMPETITION

Identification and commitment to groups are strengthened by cooperation and mutual goals within the group and by the existence of a comparison group with which to make negative comparisons. Results from various studies suggest that competition with an out-group will serve to strengthen group ties by clarifying the boundaries between the group and others (e.g., Brewer, 1991; Dion, 1979; Hogg, 1992; Sherif et al., 1961; Tajfel and Turner, 1986; also see McMillan and Chavis, 1986). The Marine Corps already makes use of these strategies by such slogans as "the few, the proud." Cooperation and shared goals among members of the group will strengthen identity and commitment (Blake and Mouton, 1979; Gaertner and Dovidio, 1991; Gaertner et al., 1990; Gaertner et al., 1989; Sherif et al., 1961; Tajfel, 1982).

One way in which the community and family programs can respond to these needs is through the scheduling of group activities. Movie theaters are good for sense of community in that they bring people together, but they do not forge a team spirit. As discussed above, activities will be most beneficial in increasing sense of community when they involve intermediate-size groups in the pursuit of common goals against an outgroup. Examples of these kinds of activities are sports that involve teams, like softball or basketball, as well as the raising of money for a common cause, community beautification projects, and anticrime campaigns.

SUBGROUPS WITH SPECIFIC
SENSE OF COMMUNITY CONCERNS

The use of programs and services to increase sense of community in the military should take into account the fact that different subgroups have different needs, concerns, and interests (also see Vernez and Zellman, 1987). A number of those for whom sense of community is most critical are discussed here.

MILITARY SERVICE MEMBERS LIVING IN OFF-BASE HOUSING

Military personnel living in off-base housing may be able to satisfy their needs for social support and identification through their memberships in civilian communities, but they may have more difficulty generating a strong military identity. In many cases, however, off-base members are concentrated in suburban areas close to the bases, so the military community may well extend beyond the gates of the military instillation. In addition, military identity may be strong among off-base military residents because they have lived in on-base housing on a previous military tour or they rely on base facilities for recreational and shopping activities.

Even when members are entrenched in a local civilian community, however, the presence of a nonmilitary identity does not preclude the formation of a strong military identity. Research on group processes indicates that individuals can maintain multiple identifications and that these identifications can be made salient under different conditions and at different times (Brewer, 1991; Turner et

al., 1987). At the same time, however, it is clear from this research that stronger identities prevail across time and contexts and have more influence on behavior. The danger is that a nonmilitary identity will be created that is strong enough to pervade the work situation. Competing identities would be especially problematic for the military if they interfere with military duties or loyalty during crises.

While such competing identities are a possibility, it is important to remember that most identities will not compete with the military identity and can exist quite comfortably beside it. These findings suggest the importance of creating a military identity among all members of the military, an identity that can be called on at appropriate moments. However, this identity does not need to be exclusive—that is, it does not have to supplant all other affiliations of military service members. The personnel support programs can help maintain a sense of military community in members living off-base by creating incentives for military members to use services and attend programs on-base. It will be particularly important to involve family members in these activities because such involvement strengthens the connection of service members to the military organization.

RELOCATED SERVICE MEMBERS

The research on contact and proximity reviewed above suggests that frequent interaction with others is likely to increase social bonds (Sherif et al., 1961; Festinger, 1950; Festinger, Schachter, and Back, 1950). Thus those who are frequently relocated will have more difficulty developing social bonds with others in the community. In support of this, two studies of community attachment in England find that residential stability is associated with stronger local friendship ties, stronger community sentiment, and higher rates of local social and political participation (Kasarda and Janowitz, 1974; Sampson, 1988).[1] Kasarda and Janowitz also propose that, beyond affecting

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[1]These civilian studies may not provide accurate insights into how relocation affects military members, because military and civilian moves are somewhat different. Most military members move about every three years and have limited discretion concerning their new location. Civilians relocate less frequently and may choose communities

individual outcomes, length of residence has effects at the macro level—with frequent turnover in communities decreasing social organization and leading to generally lower levels of friendship at the community level. While the absence of social relationships does not necessarily preclude the existence of a sense of identification with a group, Sampson (1988) does find that instability has some effect on levels of community identification.

Over the years, the military has examined a number of alternatives to the frequent relocation of military personnel. For example, studies have been conducted on the effects of relocating teams of individuals, rather than individual military members (e.g., the studies on the UMS in the Army—Furukawa et al., 1987). However, these kinds of projects are in the test stages, and no accepted alternative to the frequent relocation of individuals has arisen.

In the meantime, ongoing and modified personnel support programs can help members adapt to their new location. Programs can train buddies and organize peer support groups that help those who are new on base negotiate their way through the new environment. Other low-cost services include the provision of leaflets and guides on the local community and on the services available on the local base. Lastly, personnel support programs can create social events to which new service members are invited with their families. Making salient a larger superordinate identity that goes beyond the base level will also help newly relocated service members and their families feel a sense of shared connection with other members on their new base. Such technological innovations as email and lower-cost phone and travel costs have opened avenues for communication beyond the local level, and this communication technology provides important opportunities for service members and their families to maintain bonds at larger distances.

MILITARY SERVICE MEMBERS LIVING IN ISOLATED AREAS

In isolated areas, the absence of a large civilian community makes it especially important for the military community to meet the needs of

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that satisfy their tastes for community amenities. These differences between military and civilian moves make it difficult to generalize from civilian studies.

military service members and their families. Isolated military communities should also be concerned with preventing the formation of a community that is too cohesive and that does not allow for individual differences in military members' needs or desires for community participation. Personnel support programs can respond to these issues by developing a wide range of community programs that can satisfy the needs of the various kinds of military service members and their families.

Of course, many bases are no longer very isolated from local civilian communities. While military bases were once isolated outposts, most members now reside in metropolitan areas, and few live in areas of large military concentration.

MILITARY SERVICE MEMBERS LIVING ABROAD

The concerns for military service members living abroad closely resemble those for individuals living in isolated communities. Because the civilian community is likely to differ somewhat from the community with which most of the service members are familiar, the personnel support programs will have more responsibility for creating a community than the programs would have in a comparable location in the continental United States (CONUS). Again, this means that personnel support programs should develop different kinds of programs to satisfy the heterogeneity of service members and their families. At the same time, the unique position of bases on foreign territory leads to a concern with the attitudes individuals on-base form towards nationals of the host country and of the attitudes that the host nation forms of U.S. citizens through its contact with service members and their families. Thus an important role for the personnel support programs will involve the maintenance of partnerships between the military and local citizens.

DEPLOYED MILITARY SERVICE MEMBERS

To some degree, deployed military service members face issues similar to those of members stationed abroad. However, they also face unique issues that bring new challenges to personnel support programs. As the deployed deal with high stress, loss of culture, and a low quality of entertainment, sense of camaraderie becomes espe-

cially important for them. Because some uncertainty about the length of time that individuals will be deployed is part of any deployment and because the availability of services is likely to be significantly diminished on a temporary base, personnel support programs need to maintain morale by very quickly initiating programs to help maintain a high sense of community. The personnel support programs can encourage the use of buddies or peer support programs to help military service members deal with the stress of being away from home and the potential stresses of involvement in dangerous activities. Parallel programs should be developed to deal with the stresses faced by families left behind in the United States. As discussed, the use of peer support groups among military families will help families cope with the stresses of deployment at the same time that they allow individuals to feel that they can have an impact on the community and can make a difference in the community through their personal investments.[2]

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[2]The responsibilities for supporting deployed members are shared by various parts of the military organization. Unit leaders are immediately responsible for supporting members, recognizing problems, and seeking outside resources as needed. Personnel support programs augment the efforts of unit leaders in providing support for unit leaders as well as addressing member problems directly. This support includes access to recreational and leisure activities as well as counseling programs for stress, financial worries, and other personal problems (Buddin, 1998).

FOUR KINDS OF COMMUNITIES

A reading of the literature on the future of the military organization reveals four visions of the role of the programs and services in the maintenance of a strong community (Martin and Orthner, 1989; Ricks, 1997). The first vision is one of a large and strong military community, with central command, closed off from the outside world. The problem is that, while such an organization involves a strong sense of community, it also involves relatively large costs for the provision of programs and services and has the possible drawback of restricting freedom and creating community identity at a level that is overly large, fragmented, and dangerously isolated.

The second vision is one of several smaller communities rather than one large community. In this community, programs and services are provided by the private sector. The placement of programs and services in the civilian community gives priority to military members' needs for freedom of choice and privacy. However, this community would have the drawback of forcing service members to rebuild their communities in a new area each time they relocate, rather than being welcomed into an existing military community familiar with frequent turnover. While a largely civilian community allows military service members to satisfy their needs for supportive interactions off-base, the absence of the military community would weaken military identity significantly, and needs for identity would thus have to be satisfied through other group memberships. Some military leaders have argued that military identification is increased when programs are operated by the military rather than contracted out (Martin and Orthner, 1989). They worry that trust in the military and identification with it would decrease if programs and services

were operated by the civilian sector (Martin and Orthner, 1989). Even when off-base services are cheaper than military-provided services, these savings could be offset by losses in sense of military community; the effects of these losses on important variables, such as commitment to the military organization; and subsequent effects on military performance and retention.

The third vision of the military community takes into consideration some of the problems associated with allowing programs and services to be provided by the private sector and instead suggests that services be provided through a third party. The argument is that substantial savings would occur through the bulk purchase of services and programs, but more autonomy and privacy, and perhaps a higher quality of service, is retained for the employee (see Martin and Orthner, 1989, for a discussion of such programs). A package like this would seem viable, especially if the third parties are in areas where many service members congregate, so that the sense of community and interaction is maintained at high levels. However, the privacy and autonomy for which third parties were initially introduced would be lost.

The fourth type of community takes into consideration some of the problems associated with the previous three: high costs of programs and services, needs for privacy, and needs for connection to the civilian world. According to this perspective, programs and services should be fine-tuned to meet the unique needs of service members and should be targeted at increasing well-being, commitment, and readiness through increasing emphasis on the base community. Connections between civilian and military life should be maintained through frequent contacts. In this community, the military would allow, and be concerned with, both on- and off-base communities. However, because military leaders have less control over the size and quality of the community outside the base, they would put more emphasis on the base community.

STUDYING SENSE OF COMMUNITY IN THE MILITARY

As discussed, a problem in fine-tuning programs and services to increase sense of community is that little reliable information is available on the success or failure of each of the programs and services in approaching these goals (see Vernez and Zellman, 1987, for a discussion). A comprehensive assessment of the programs and services would involve a longitudinal study across multiple bases including objective as well as subjective variables. Such a study would examine the role of programs and services in influencing important outcomes, such as sense of community, subjective well-being, identification with the military community, and commitment to the military organization, as well as performance, retention, and readiness. The study should include measures of the characteristics of military members and their families; availability and use of programs and services; subjective perceptions; characteristics of the base on which military members reside (e.g., location, size, availability of services, base expenditure on services); and measures of the missions and activities the base. Also, the study should include measures of the characteristics of the surrounding community, such as housing prices, availability of services, and the state of the local economy. Models for a study of this kind can be found in studies of the impact of various aspects of college on students. For example, Astin (1993) conducted a four-year longitudinal study of 25,000 college students at various colleges and universities across the United States. The study controls for a host of individual characteristics and perceptions at college entry and then examines changes during the college years, looking at the effects of such factors as college characteristics, characteristics of the students' peers and faculty, and the experiences of students during college (including work, recreation,

and educational experiences). The study examines the weight of these factors on the outcomes of various groups of students.

MEASURES OF COMMUNITY

A study of the role of personnel support programs in maintaining a high quality of life will need to use a comprehensive measure of sense of community. Many measures of sense of community have been developed in the literature (e.g., see Bachrach and Zautra, 1985; Buckner, 1988; Glynn, 1981; Herek and Glunt, 1995; McMillan and Chavis, 1986; Nasar and Julian, 1995). Unfortunately, many measures of sense of community were developed without the benefit of a conceptual definition (see McMillan and Chavis, 1986, for a discussion). Researchers have often used post-hoc techniques, such as factor analysis, to develop their measures of sense of community, without the guidance of a theoretical framework. Also, researchers often assume that each of the components contributes equally to sense of community, even though it seems likely that some feelings, experiences, and needs are more important than others (see McMillan and Chavis, 1986, for a discussion).

A review of the literature suggests that a measure of sense of community in the military would include the following aspects of sense of community for each member of the community:

Measures of Sense of Community as Supportive Relationships and Interactions

1. The individuals' actual and intended participation in military community activities (e.g., community involvement and community socializing).

2. Attachment to the military community (e.g., feelings about being part of the community, feeling at home in the community).

3. Satisfaction with the military community (e.g., satisfaction with neighbors and neighborhood, safety, privacy, anonymity).

4. Evaluation of self as a member of the military community (e.g., "As a member of the military, I feel I do not have much to be proud of"; "As a member of the military, on the whole I am

satisfied with myself" (see also Herek and Glunt, 1995; Rosenberg, 1979).

5. Subjective assessment of how the military community is evaluated by important others.

Measures of Sense of Community as Identification

1. The positivity of military identity (i.e., the individuals' evaluation of military identity as an aspect of the self).

2. The centrality of military identity (i.e., the importance of military identity as an aspect of the self).

3. Adoption of military community values, beliefs, and symbols.

AVOIDING POSSIBLE ADVERSE CONSEQUENCES OF INCREASING SENSE OF COMMUNITY

While it is likely that increasing sense of community will have positive effects on quality of life; commitment to the military organization; and readiness, retention, and performance, the same literature indicating that strong relationships within a group have positive consequences also indicates that strengthening ties may have negative effects. Three of these possible adverse effects are examined here.

INGROUP IDENTIFICATION MAY LEAD TO OUTGROUP DENIGRATION

To secure loyalty, groups must satisfy not only members' needs for assimilation and belonging, but must also satisfy members' needs for differentiation: maintaining clear boundaries that separate the group from other groups (Brewer, 1991). The military organization has two natural outgroups: the civilian population and the "enemy." While social science research suggests that identification with the military could be increased by focusing on the distinctions between members of the military organization and these two outgroups, such actions must be taken with caution. Differentiation from outgroups can have unintended negative consequences, such as isolation from other groups and the denigration of outgroup members (Sherif et al., 1961; Tajfel and Turner, 1986). The likelihood and intensity of negative consequences depend in part on the outgroup chosen as a reference group and in part on the relationships between one's own group and the outgroup.

In general, negative effects of ingroup identification on conflict between groups can be minimized by long-standing interpersonal contact between equal-status individuals of the two groups, by the absence of competition, and the presence of superordinate goals (Blake and Mouton, 1979; Miller and Brewer, 1984; Pettigrew, 1988; Sherif et al., 1961; Stephan, 1985, 1987). Specifically, people are most likely to develop positive attitudes toward members of an outgroup when they associate with individuals from this group on a positive basis over a extended period. The contact should be encouraged on a basis that is free of roles (that is, contact should occur on an individual basis rather than between members of the two groups). Also, members of the two groups should have equal status. There should be no competition between the two groups, and there should be a shared goal toward which members of the two groups are striving.

Distinctions Between the Military and Civilian Life

Civilians are not what may appear at first sight to be a natural outgroup for the military. After all, the goal of the Department of Defense is the protection of American citizens and the American way of life. Any division between the military and civilian life would place the military in a difficult position both in understanding the needs of civilians and in responding to any endangerment of civilians' needs. The military is a service for civilians and therefore must respect their decisions and values. When the military community departs from civilian values, problems can occur with the development of differential norms. In addition, the military has pragmatic reasons for positive attitudes toward the civilian community in that a large percentage of military personnel live in the civilian community and in that the Defense Department considers the reentry of military personnel into civilian society as part of its mission.

While relations with the civilian community are clearly important to the military community, the military often finds itself contrasting itself from civilian life. Members of the military see themselves as among the finest examples of what the American way of life has to offer and are encouraged to make comparisons with civilian life that favor military life (for a somewhat more negative interpretation of such differences see Ricks, 1997; also see Hadley, 1986; Huntington,

1957). For example, Ricks (1997) reports that 81 percent of Basic School lieutenants believe that the military's values are closer to the values of the Founding Fathers than are the values of the civilian society. Also, a majority of the officers at the Basic School and at the Command and Staff College agreed that a gap existed between the military and civil society, and they expected this gap to increase. While these practices may increase sense of community and commitment to the organization, they may inadvertently also heighten the isolation of military families from the larger community (see Martin and Orthner, 1989, for discussion).

In its official policy, the Department of Defense would thus be well-served to maintain high morale and commitment to the best traditions of American life by a positive but nonexclusive comparison with civilian life. That is, the military organization can place itself as a subgroup of the larger civilian society—one that has unique goals and values but that at its base shares the values of the larger society. Such a comparison would strengthen military personnel's social identity as members of the military without inadvertently creating a sense of alienation from civilian society or complicating reentry into that civilian world at the completion of an individual's military duty. Positive relations between the military and civilian society will be strengthened by military-civilian partnerships on projects that serve mutual goals. One natural group that may facilitate these links would be retired military personnel (see Martin and Orthner, 1989).

Distinctions Between the Military and the "Enemy"

While too great a distinction between the military and civilian society might damage the military, this danger is less of a concern for the use of the actual "enemy" as an outgroup. To the extent that the military can formulate a profile of an outgroup (or outgroups) that serves as a threat to civilians and the American way of life, and with whom identification and contact is not desired, this would serve to strengthen military personnel's commitment to the military organization and give personnel a strong sense of purpose.

Recent changes in the military mission, such as an increasing number of missions with humanitarian goals, may make it necessary to formulate a broad rather than specific profile of the outgroup, or better yet, to create profiles of multiple outgroups with somewhat

different characteristics. For example, the post–Cold War missions could define the outgroup as those who wish to limit democracy, those who spread ethnic hatred, or those who seek to obtain power by illegitimate means. Identification of the outgroup would also have the added advantage of clearly communicating military goals to personnel. While this is an area of concern for the military as a whole, it may be less relevant to community and family support programs. However, to the extent that a discussion of the "enemy" is a part of the personnel support programs, the programs should take care to avoid the mislabeling of the enemy by defining who is the "enemy." The danger here would be in not being clear enough about who is a member of the outgroup, and this could lead to the unintended denigration of individuals who appear to be members of the outgroup. Denigration like this occurred during World War II with the internment of individuals of Japanese descent (citizens and noncitizens) living in the United States, as well as during the McCarthy era, with the mislabeling of many individuals as communists. The military organization can discourage the stereotyping of outgroup members and prejudice and discrimination against outgroup members by making it clear that bias will not be tolerated and by encouraging positive contact with individuals who may be mistaken for the "enemy."

INCREASING SENSE OF COMMUNITY MAY LIMIT INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM

While it is quite clear that increasing the average sense of community within the military would have positive effects for the organization, some individuals may well respond negatively to the increasing pressures toward belonging (see also Martin and Orthner, 1989). These pressures may be felt in loss of autonomy, loss in ability to make meaningful life choices, and perceptions of loss of privacy. Communities should take into account differences among individuals in their needs and preferences for participation in the community and for differences in the way they satisfy their needs for community. While some members of the military organization may wish to satisfy their needs for community on-base with other military families (whether stationed in the United States or abroad), others may have more of a need to satisfy their needs for community outside the base, with nonmilitary members. Individual differences

like these occur not only among military personnel, but also among their spouses and children. Forcing military groups to become more cohesive may result in dissatisfaction among certain individuals, and this could result in increasing attrition within this group, as well as decreases in recruiting of individuals from this group. The impact of individual dissatisfaction and attrition on the military organization will depend on the characteristics of this minority. The military will need to make a decision about the necessity of participation of these members in the military organization and will need to take steps, if appropriate, to identify and approach the specific needs of these groups.

At the same time a number of steps can be taken to prevent loss of freedom. First, the sense of community should be encouraged rather than forced. Second, community behavior should be rewarded through refreshments and other benefits and through the honoring of community members who have shown exceptional community behavior, rather than punishing an absence of community behaviors. Also, the managers of personnel support programs should encourage feedback from community members about the programs and about how community members think programs may be altered to increase their sense of freedom. The provision of a community forum in which community members can express their opinions and request changes would be one way to monitor and ensure satisfaction with the personnel support programs.

AN EMPHASIS ON SENSE OF COMMUNITY MUST BE COMBINED WITH STRONG TASK INVOLVEMENT IN THE WORKGROUP

In focusing on sense of community as one factor that increases commitment, retention, performance, and readiness, there is always the danger of putting too much emphasis on this factor while ignoring others. One such important factor is task involvement. The extensive recommendations for events that bring together and increase interaction between individuals in the community must of course always be combined with strong task involvement within the workgroup. While task involvement at the workgroup level falls outside the boundaries of the personnel support programs, an excessive

focus on socializing without an equally strong emphasis on the task at hand may interfere with task performance (Lott and Lott, 1965; Zaccaro and Lowe, 1988). An emphasis on task involvement can be maintained through job training, career counseling, and the provision of clear job goals.

CONCLUSIONS

The Department of Defense has implemented a variety of personnel support programs. The programs have been set up to address a number of concerns, only one of which is sense of community. Some of the programs are concerned with sense of community by their very nature, such as the recreation programs, while others indirectly address sense of community through the effects they have on the welfare of service members. Recent changes in budgets and the military mission have prompted a reevaluation of the personnel support programs and their role in maintaining a high quality of life in the military organization. When military budgets are cut, the allocation of resources to maintain a good quality of life becomes more important than ever (Kerce, 1995).

The material in this report has made clear that programs and services in and of themselves do not build communities. Instead, programs and services are the tools that can be used by the military to allow individuals to become productive members of the community, and thus the programs provide a forum in which experiences that increase a sense of community can be arranged. Well-structured programs contribute to improvements in retention, performance, and readiness that follow from the impact of sense of community on increases in commitment to the military organization and subjective quality of life. Also, the military has various other goals that cannot be evaluated in the usual readiness, retention, and performance terms—for example, "life skills" that military members acquire while in the military may help them be better citizens when they leave the military. The merits of such additional goals will need to be evalu-

ated with other tools, and their relevant outcomes will need to be specified before a cost-benefit analysis can be conducted.

The wise response will be to spend in areas that will aid the military's goals and cut programs that do not add to morale maintenance or that are available elsewhere. The issue thus becomes one of maximizing those programs that have the largest positive impact (or that limit the most negative impact) on commitment to the military and subjective quality of life, and eliminating programs that have little or no impact.

Some of the recommendations made in this report to increase sense of community can be accomplished at low costs—for example, the move from individual counseling to include group and peer counseling. Efforts to increase community by having members of one section of the community invest their time and effort in helping others in the community will increase the sense of community for both those who provide the help and those who receive it. Similarly, a refocusing on community events to target those individuals whose interaction is most likely to pay off in stronger feelings of community is not a higher cost but a refocusing of efforts. The literature suggests that the most effective targeting of these interactions is at the level of intermediate-size groups where individuals have a large potential for interaction but do not work closely on a day-to-day basis.

Other recommendations involve greater costs and must be evaluated against the benefits that they can bring to the organization. The information needed to make such decisions is not available in the present literature. Obtaining the required information would involve a number of steps. Altering programs to meet community goals more efficiently first involves defining what community goals are and then eliminating any programs that do not meet these goals. This would consist of research into the efficiency of programs in meeting community goals. Such research would need to contain longitudinal studies of multiple military bases and would need to include both objective variables, such as community member characteristics, program availability, program use, and base expenditure on programs, as well as variables that measure the subjective experience of military personnel, such as perceived social support and identification with and commitment to the military. The results of these studies may

suggest that it is necessary to create new programs that more closely follow the principles on increasing sense of community.

Before any changes in programs are implemented on a large scale, programs should be partially implemented and their effects assessed. Also, programs should be implemented with differentiation in mind: differentiation across the services and across bases, to take into account differential needs of service members. While new budgets and military mission will bring substantial changes in military life, the necessity of an evaluation of the new status quo that these changes bring can in the end achieve a set of programs that accomplish their goals more efficiently.

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